

CHAMBARA!

"Chan-chan. Bara-bara."

Swords clash as the heroes battle their way across the screen. This is chambara--the popular blood-and-thunder literature of Japan--read, watched and loved by people of all ages. You can see chambara on TV, read it in novel form, watch it on the kabuki stage, hear it from rakugo storytellers.

Not all chambara stars are swordsmen. Heiji, the famous detective, disarms his adversaries by hurling coins at them. Some chambara stars use pistols, some bamboo swords, others strategy. A few, like Yoshitsune Minamoto, are historical, but most are fictional characters, whose exploits and derring do combine fact and fiction, suspense and humor.

The United Church of Christ in Japan Bureau of Publication has just published Chambara Ningenron (Chambara Anthropology) by Rev. Jiro Iwamoto, 39, pastor of Mine Kyodan Church in Yamaguchi, an avid chambara fan. In a new journalistic technique, Iwamoto takes a look at human nature as characterized by chambara heroes, at the same time drawing an outline of the Christian view of man.

For instance, Kyonosuke and Chiba Shusaku illustrate two attitudes toward the Kingdom of God. Kyonosuke was a samurai who lived a life of hurting and being hurt by others. Chiba, although he was unexcelled in the art of swordsmanship, recognized man's limitations. He acquired his own sense of selfhood and independence by living in tune with a force greater than himself.

Iwamoto feels that chambara heroes are strong personalities and distinctively Japanese. In a time when Japanese are looking for a new personal identity, he suggests that chambara heroes demonstrate different types of men: the nihilist, the egoist, the person who experiences "new life." Because many chambara stars show the influence of Buddhism, they provide a good medium for comparing Buddhist and Christian ideas.



Iwamoto himself reads and draws on a wide range of literature. He says that most readers of authors like Dazai, Soseki and Akutagawa are familiar with Christian concepts. Many chambara fans, however, do not read these authors; yet they too are entitled to know the Christian view of man.

Iwamoto was deeply influenced by the writings of Shinran, a Buddhist priest, who lived in the 13th century. "By studying Buddhism, I came to understand Christianity more clearly," he says.

KYODAN WOMEN INVESTIGATE TRENDS IN TEXTBOOKS

A group of busy housewives with school-age children and demanding home schedules are the editors of a new book on textbook attitudes toward World War II that is receiving wide attention throughout the church and in the secular press.

Publication in February of Kyokasho wo Kangaeru (How to Evaluate Textbooks) by the Kyodan Bureau of Publication capped two years of quick-cooked dinners, hurried housecleaning, midnight study and scholarly research on the part of the seven members of a special committee on the textbook problem of the National Federation of Kyodan Women's Societies.

The women didn't start out to write a book. They started out to meet informally as mothers concerned with what their children were learning about the war Japan was engaged in from 1941 to 1946--a period whose memories are still painful to them.

"I was sixteen in 1941, just the age my daughter is now," explains Eiko Ukai, one of the committee members and wife of Isamu Ukai, pastor of Ginza Church, Tokyo. "I was in the first year of middle school but I didn't have a chance to study. We had to go to work in factories, and continued working until the war ended in 1946.

"All through elementary school, our textbooks taught us that our nation was divine, that the war was a holy war, that what Japan was doing was right. Because we had been taught these things for years, we didn't question them. When the war ended with Japan's defeat, it was very hard for us to realize what had happened."

Most of the committee members, like Mrs. Ukai, have children the age that they were during the war. As the mothers began to study the textbooks now being used in the schools, they sensed a tendency to return to the war-time philosophy--the mythology about the founding of Japan, the position that what Japan did was right, little reference to the atomic bombs. Sometimes the children themselves questioned what they were learning at school.

For two years, the women met monthly to pursue their study. They invited educational experts, including a representative of the Ministry of Education. They analyzed textbooks from the Meiji period, wartime Japan, post-war Japan, and current revisions. They attended a trial dealing with textbooks. They gathered samples from the main textbook publishers. They surveyed Christian school teachers and church women to determine the extent of awareness of the textbook problem. They found people interested but lacking information.

Aware that they were not experts but anxious to encourage others to engage in the kind of study they had done, the committee members agreed to publish their materials as a "mothers' research report." To keep the price low so that women in farming and fishing villages as well as in cities could buy it, they waived manuscript fees.

But editorial efforts demanded even more time and energy:

"Please try to keep a little more quiet. Mother is studying."

"I meant to cook you a good dinner tonight, but I'm just too tired. I'm just going to fix something quick."

"I didn't begin to write last night until after eleven, when the children were finally in bed and the house picked up."

Publication of Kyokasho wo Kangaeru has coincided with a rising consciousness about the textbook on the part of the general public. The women hope their book will make available to church women and other parents' groups basic materials by which they can become informed about the problem, in all its complexities--content, authority, process of revision. Secular newspapers like the Mainichi, Asahi, Tokyo Shimbun, have featured the women's efforts as an example of citizen action.

On the one hand, the achievement is an impressive example of Japanese "women power," uncovering latent research and writing talents. On the other hand, the women themselves are quick to say, "A mother can't do something like this without the cooperation of the whole family." "We could never have done it without our husbands' help." And husbands tend to agree.

IN THE DISTRICT ASSEMBLIES

--by Harue Yoshioka

The main purpose of the district assemblies, held in April and May, was the election of delegates to the 17th Kyodan General Assembly, scheduled to be held this fall, in the midst of very turbulent conditions. Heated discussions took place in the assemblies on the fundamental policy of mission, the revision of Article 9 of the Kyodan Constitution, the problem of the Tokyo Union Theological Seminary and the relationship of these to the problems of the 70s, such as Expo, Yasukuni, the Mutual Security Treaty, etc.

As of June 15, 14 districts out of 16 have held their general assemblies. However, the Osaka assembly was adjourned before the business was completed, and Kanagawa and Hyogo will continue discussions in extra sessions. The two districts which have not yet had their assemblies are Tokyo and Kyoto.

A Trend Toward Younger Delegations

Since the 16th Extraordinary General Assembly last fall--the so-called "Expo Assembly"--the nature and status of the delegates who compose the General Assembly has been seriously questioned in each district. In some districts (Oou and Kyushu), before the election of new delegates, each delegate to the 15th or 16th General Assembly was requested to give his evaluation of the Assembly and report on his own position. In these elections, there was a trend, on the whole, toward the election of younger delegates, and the average age of the delegations is dropping. One district (Shikoku) passed a resolution to the effect that four of the nine ministerial delegates should be under thirty, and three of the nine lay delegates should be under forty.

In the Higashi-Chugoku district, almost all of the newly elected lay delegates were from smaller cities, the members having taken seriously the criticism that usually ministers and laymen from big cities were re-elected. Kanagawa and Hyogo districts will elect their delegates in extra sessions.

The Tokyo Union Theological Seminary Problem

In the majority of the districts, there is deep regret over the present situation of Tokyo Union Theological Seminary. The problem is regarded not merely as a school struggle but as a problem closely related to the life of each church.

The assemblies attempted to provide time for explanations of the situation by inviting representatives of the TSTS faculty and students. In Tokai district, because the faculty representative refused to sit with the Zenkyoto (All-Campus Joint Struggle Committee) students, the presentations were made in shifts. In the case of Tohoku and Kyushu, a professor attended in a private capacity, not as a faculty representative, sat with the students and took part in discussions. Though procedures differed from district to district delegates were reported to have caught the point of the problem.

Seven districts (Hokkai, Oou, Kanto, Chubu, Nishi-Chugoku, Shikoku and Kyushu) voted to issue statements of protest addressed to the president and to the faculty of TSTS. Generally, these statements 1) protested against the Seminary's having called in riot police, who are representative of the power of the national government, and also protested against the removal of half of the students for non-registration; 2) requested withdrawal of charges against Zenkyoto students and renewed efforts for all-campus discussions for the purpose of unity and reconstruction.

There were also statements issued calling upon All-Campus Joint Struggle Committee students to reflect upon their excesses and faults.

Fundamental Policy on Mission and Other Matters

In Hokkai, Oou, Tohoku, Kanagawa and Chubu districts, considerable time was spent in considering fundamental policy of mission for districts, as it is related to '70 problems.

Other issues taken up by the various districts included revision of the Constitution (see Kyodan News Letter No. 44 of May 20), a minimum salary for pastors, pensions, the establishment of new preaching points, the church kindergarten, etc. Ordination of new ministers took place in Oou, Tohoku, Kanto, Chubu, Nishi-Chugoku and Kyushu districts.

KOKORO NO TOMO CIRCULATION REACHES 150,000

In what is considered a remarkable feat in Christian journalism in Japan, the Kyodan's four-page evangelism newspaper, Kokoro no Tomo, reached a circulation of 150,000 with publication of the June issue. Sixty fellow journalists and publishers attended an appreciation dinner given by the Kyodan Bureau of Publication on May 21 on behalf of Editor Yoichi Harada, his staff and editorial advisors and contributors.

At the dinner Rev. Kinichi Ishii, chairman of the Kokoro no Tomo publication committee, cited the two principles that have guided Kokoro no Tomo: 1) to express the message of the Christian faith not in the usual "churchy" vocabulary but in a popular style of journalism that is able to speak to the man-in-the street; 2) to be a basic tool in the churches' evangelism and outreach to those outside the church.

Distribution of the Kokoro no Tomo is primarily through churches and in conjunction with the radio program, Kokoro no Tomo. Some small congregations take two or three times the number of their own membership for distribution to neighbors, kindergarten parents, seekers.

what has been --- IN THE KYODAN --- what is to be

I. Coming Events

Education Committee and Research Institute to sponsor seminar June 27 on new high school curriculum announced by Ministry of Education (Shimpo 6/6)

II. Education

see "Coming Events"

Evangelism

Thirteen churches are lending aid to smaller churches this year in program of long-term evangelistic assistance (Shimpo 6/6)

Changing the situation and the psychology with regard to the "small church" and evaluating the 10-year evangelism plan that began in 1962 are major items at June 1 Evangelism Committee meeting (Shimpo 6/13)

Evangelism Committee studies qualitative strength of the church (Shimpo 6/20)

Kyodan (national and district level)

Tokyo district holds preparatory meeting with sub-district chairmen

June 3 looking to plans for delayed general assembly (Shimpo 6/13)

Association to Promote Normalization of Kyodan publishes results of its survey in Domei News, No. 1 (Shimbun 6/13)

Publication

Kyokasho wo Kangaeru (How to Evaluate Textbooks) is produced by

Kyodan's National Women's Federation (Shimpo 5/20; News Letter 6/20)

Kokoro no Tomo, evangelism newspaper, passes 150,000 circulation (Shimpo 6/6, News Letter 6/20)

Social

Christian Social Work League meets May 18-20 in Miyajima, visits Seirei-en site (Shimpo 6/20)

Committee on Social Concerns issues statement on U.S.-Japan Mutual Security Treaty (Shimpo 6/20)

see also "Coming Events"

TUTS

Special Tokyo Union Theological Seminary study committee hears voices of faculty, registered students, "joint struggle" students (Shimpo 6/20)

Women

see "Publication"

Yasukuni

see "Coming Events"

Shimpo = Kyodan weekly

Shimbun = Kirisuto Shimbun weekly month/date

For further information on any of these items, please refer to these sources or write to the Kyodan News Letter.